

Changing God's Mind?

Sunday, 6th June, 2010



Ichneumonidae parasitic wasp – lays eggs in spider's brain – spider's behaviour changes (stops making the sticky part of web)

This is an illustration of repentance.

The most common word for repent in the NT is "Metanoia" which means to change your mind or understanding.

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. (Romans 12:2)

There are a number of wrong ideas we can have about God and about prayer that can paralyse our prayer lives.

Over the last few weeks we have looked at what Jesus taught about prayer; if we hear what Jesus says and it gets into us, then it softens our hearts into relationship with our Father instead of praying out of duty or fear.

I think that there is another way of thinking that we need to get right to help us to pray; that is the question about whether it works.

Will my prayer make any difference?

Will my prayer actually make something happen that wouldn't have happened anyway?

We have to know the answers to these questions, otherwise how can we pray with faith?

In Hebrews 11 it says:

And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. (Hebrews 11:6)

If we don't know the answer to this, then it is like having a maggot of doubt in our minds, chewing away at our faith. And until we deal with it, our behaviour won't change.

If you want to be transformed in the way you pray, then it will happen by the renewing of your mind.

So I want to look today at two more misunderstandings about prayer that can get into our heads that can rob us of a growing prayer relationship with our Heavenly Father.

The first lie is that God will do whatever He wants – and nothing we can pray or do will change what is going to happen anyway.

This lie can appear in many ways – and some of them sound very religious.

There is a Muslim phrase – “Inshallah” (**إن شاء الله**) which means “By the will of Allah”

– ‘I am going on holiday next month, Inshallah.’

This sounds very similar to something the Bible says:

Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." (James 4:13-15)

But the whole basis is different; the Qur'an talks about Allah as being unknowable, whereas Jesus came, and then the Holy Spirit was sent in order to make God known.

If we do not and cannot know God and cannot know what He is going to do, but it will be what he wants, then what's the point praying?

The Bible talks about God who wants to be known so much that He sent His Son, and although the passage in James says don't boast in your plans, but submit them to God, it doesn't mean that we can't know Him or His Ways.

Other faiths – Sikhism and Hinduism, have a strong belief in Karma or fate; that what will happen, will happen and nothing can really change it. Once something has happened, there will be cause and effect and nothing can change it.

If that's the case, then what is the point in praying or having faith if it won't change anything?

I think that both of these 'maggots' have crept into Christian thinking – "Whatever will be, will be" type fatalism and "Inshallah" God will do whatever He wants.

If we believe either of these, then what's the point praying?

There is another dangerous worm that has crept into Christianity – through bad teaching. And it says ask God for whatever you want and if you believe enough, then God will answer you.

The danger of this is that it reduces God to a kind of heavenly cash machine; pray, punch in the right numbers, and out will come whatever you asked for.

I know God does give us more than we could ever ask or imagine – God has taught me about His Goodness many times

There was a time when I lived in a very cold house one winter and I was walking home one day thinking "I'd love a duvet"; I walked home, into my room and there was a duvet on my bed! Someone no-one had ever seen before had knocked on the door and said "Does anyone need a duvet?" and the person who answered said thanks and put it on the first bed they saw without one – mine!

But the danger is that the stuff can become more important than God – and if we ever want answers to prayer more than we want to know God, then that’s idolatry

The invitation that Jesus gave us when He was teaching on prayer was “Come into relationship – ‘Father’” And sometimes relationship means that the answer will be no.

“Dad, can I have a gun?”

And we need to be ready to trust that God knows better than we do what we need.

If I was driving to somewhere I had never been to before and I had someone with me who knew the way, then it would be sensible to trust him – even if it wasn’t the way I wanted to go. And if I said “I want to go down this road” and got told “No – it’s not the way” that wouldn’t become a point of argument, because clearly, the guide would be directing me out of a place of knowing more than me.

So the question ‘does God do whatever He wants, or can our prayers change God’s Mind?’ is the wrong question.

Jesus did answer this question, but not how we expect; He said “Your heavenly Father...”

Prayer isn’t firstly about answers; it’s about relationship.

It’s not about us blindly following a god we can’t know down a road that can’t be changed; and it’s not about us dictating to God what we want (by faith) and where we want to go.

It’s about God teaching us about Himself and leading us in His Ways – the best way, and in the process, training us as His sons.

In a Jewish family a son would be trained and apprenticed in the family business. Once the father had taught the son everything to do with the family business and had trained him in character, so that he could be trusted, then the father would hold a ceremony where he would gather the village together and say “This is my beloved son; with him I am well pleased!”

From that point on, the son would be an heir and would be able to speak on the father's behalf on business deals. From that point on, if you made a deal with the son, it would be the same legally as making a deal with the father.

This is so different from "Inshallah" - "if God wills it" which comes from a place of not knowing God

God invites us to pray out of a place of knowing Him – and growing in prayer and in faith is primarily about Him growing us closer to Himself as sons.

I have heard people ask the question "Do our prayers change God's Mind?"

I think it is the wrong question.

Years ago I was driving round a city in Romania, late at night, lost, with no map. Miraculously, we found the place we needed to get to, but then had no idea how to get back to where we were staying.

A local Romanian man spoke to us and said "Do you want me to show you the way?" He got in the car and started directing me as I drove.

At that point, I wasn't interested in changing his mind or persuading him to go the way I wanted, although I was driving the car and could have gone wherever I wanted.

What I needed at that point was to know enough about him to know I could trust him.

Walking with God is not about us trying to change His mind – because He knows the Way and we don't (although sometimes we think we know better!)

It's about changing us so that we can trust Him and so that we can know Him and His Ways.

Once that happens, then the way we pray changes.

God is inviting us to know Him; to be trained diligently by the Holy Spirit – to be led into all truth; to walk with him; to come to know Him and so to become His Sons in whom He has full confidence; to only do what we see our Father doing.

God is inviting us "Come and pray as Sons!"